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Cockfighters

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More Great Plays Available
From OWP

The Sacred Geometry of S&M Porn
by Johnna Adams

16 Actors playing various roles

Synopsis: A troubled young man with a stack of dirty magazines + a dead woman stealing souls + a televangelist grilled by Mike Wallace + a whore seeking enlightenment + a disgruntled woman wielding a gun = an assassination plot, weird sex, the Crystal Cathedral, a whole lotta money and a new religion.

****Contains nudity and adult subject matter****

Vile Affections
by Vanda

5 Females, 3 Males

Synopsis: Vile Affections is the true story of Benedetta Carlini, a seventeenth century abbess, who is brought up on charges of false mysticism. It is only when Benedetta begins to upset the church that government officials are forced to investigate. The investigators seek the truth, but the truth they uncover shakes their world beyond anything they could have imagined. This is the story of the first written record of a lesbian relationship.

COCKFIGHTERS

by Johnna Adams

Cockfighters first premiered at the Hunger Artists Theatre Company (Fullerton, CA) on June 7, 2002. It was directed by Deanna Keefe; the set was designed by Melissa Petro and Tim Harrison; lighting by Tim Harrison and Deanna Keefe; sound by Mike Miller; stage managed by R. J. Romero. The cast was as follows:

DWIGHT FOWLER	Cary Cook
HUMP McCLAIN	Bryan Prince
CLARENCE FOWLER	Scott Westra
SHIRL FOWLER	Jami McCoy
RYE SAWYER	Martin Winslow
CD FOWLER	Mark Coyan
TAMMY JEAN WILKINS	Kimberly Fisher

Cockfighters first premiered in New York at The Oberon Theater Ensemble (Jan Hus Playhouse, New York, NY) on January 24, 2003. It was directed by Sarah Gurfield; the set was designed by WT McRae; lighting by Aaron J. Mason; sound by Michael Juarez. The cast was as follows:

DWIGHT FOWLER	Bill Fairbairn
HUMP McCLAIN	David Sitler
CLARENCE FOWLER	Scot Carlisle
SHIRL FOWLER	Eevin Hartsough
RYE SAWYER	Raphael Fetta
CD FOWLER	Patrick Melville
TAMMY JEAN WILKINS	Dawn Sobeczak

Cast of Characters

DWIGHT FOWLER, 50s, Father of CLARENCE, SHIRL, and CD
HUMP McCLAIN, 40s, County Sheriff
CLARENCE FOWLER, 17, DWIGHT's son
SHIRL FOWLER, 17, CLARENCE's twin sister
RYE SAWYER, 19, HUMP's nephew and SHIRL's boyfriend
CD FOWLER, 30s, DWIGHT's oldest son
TAMMY JEAN WILKINS, 30s, CD's girlfriend

Setting

The cockfights are held in an old barn on DWIGHT's farm in West Texas. DWIGHT's truck is parked inside and backed up to the pit.

CD, RYE, and TAMMY are in a deserted cornfield. CD's truck (can also be DWIGHT's truck) is parked nearby.

RYE and SHIRL are at the FOWLER house, TJ's liquor store, and on the road to the cemetery in Dimmitt, TX.

Transitions between locations are indicated by light changes and changes of actors' focus.

Time

The present. About midnight.

COCKFIGHTERS

CD FOWLER enters holding a bottle of Jack Daniels and the loose end of a brown leather belt. CD is drunk and enters laughing. The other end of the belt is buckled around RYE's neck. His hands are tied in front of him. Duct tape covers his mouth.

CD breaks off laughing and

CD: *(Sings— "Don't Take Your Guns to Town" by Johnny Cash)*

His mother's words echoed again
"Don't take your guns to town, son
Leave your guns at home, Bill
Don't take your guns to town."

Filled with rage then Billy Joe
Reached for his gun to draw
But the stranger drew his gun and fired
Before he even saw

As Billy Joe fell to the floor
The crowd all gathered 'round
And wondered at his final words,
"Don't take your guns to town, son
Leave your guns at home, Bill
Don't take your guns to town."

(CD kicks RYE in the kneecap and sends him sprawling to the dust.)

CD: I bet you think it's all over and done with. Right? And God is sitting in heaven on his throne of bone and gold with his almighty goodness just pointing his finger down at you and me saying, "Heal yourselves, my boys. Forgive each other and get on with life." Like that damned preacher did in that joke of a eulogy. Like your god-damned mama thinks. Stuck her dried up little face under my nose, standing over my sister's grave and says, "Don't you start no trouble with my boy, now, with your big mouth and your drinking, CD Fowler. Because everyone knows my Rye didn't kill that girl. He loved Shirl. He looved her. So don't you start nothing. Because as sure as there is a god, I'll finish it if you start something with him." . . . Did you ask her to do that? Did you say, "Mama, please. Get up in CD's face at Shirl's funeral and put the fear of God in him. Cause you know what that sonofabitch is like when he gets liquored up." Did you tell her that?

(Rye shakes his head.)

CD: You might fool your Mama, and you might fool the preacher with his talk about bygones and Christ's other cheek. He can kiss this cheek. (*Slaps his ass.*) Because Christ didn't have no sister that I ever heard about, and he didn't put one in the ground at seventeen. We are gone beyond Christ's other cheek, boy. And moving down to Christ's fist, Christ's steel toed boots and the fear of God. Somebody that's tied up and bleeding not too far from here killed my sister, you little sonofabitch!

(*TAMMY JEAN WILKINS enters.*)

TAMMY: CD! CD, can we go back now? What are you doing?

(*CD glares at her. Light shift.*)

The inside of an old barn in Dimmitt, Texas. DWIGHT FOWLER's farm. A large square pit has been dug about two feet deep. There are four steel bars embedded in cement at the corners of the pit. Sagging chicken wire is stretched between the bars on three sides forming a low fence. The red dirt bottom is covered with gore and feathers. A Ford pickup is parked with the tailgate to the pit. The truck holds bales of hay, feedbags, and empty wire bird crates.

CLARENCE is asleep in the bed of the truck. We see his feet sticking over the tailgate. DWIGHT sits on a large beer cooler. To either side of him, more crates are stacked haphazard. DWIGHT's hands are twisted by arthritis. HUMP enters. He wears a sheriff's uniform but carries no gun.)

HUMP: Dwight?

DWIGHT: Hello, there, Hump.

HUMP: I was worried about you. Sitting in here all alone.

DWIGHT: Ain't alone. I got Clarence with me.

HUMP: Oh? Where's he at?

DWIGHT: He's in the truck.

HUMP: Well, where's CD at?

DWIGHT: You see his truck outside?

HUMP: Nope.

DWIGHT: Guess he ain't here.

HUMP: Well. Well. Fair enough. . . . How's your arthritis been treating you?

DWIGHT: Oh, not too good.

HUMP: Well, that's a shame.

DWIGHT: Uh huh. . . . Did you come out here to shut us down?

HUMP: Shut you down?

DWIGHT: Yeah.

HUMP: How do you mean shut you down?

DWIGHT: Shut down the cockfights.

HUMP: (*Laughs*) Oh, hell no. I don't care about that. I mean officially I guess I should. But, no. I didn't come out here for that. No, I ain't no killjoy kind of guy. I been to some cockfights myself. I don't think you have to be some killjoy kind of guy when you strap on a badge. How did you all do? Get a good crowd out?

DWIGHT: Pretty good.

HUMP: Where are your birds at?

DWIGHT: Lost 'em.

HUMP: You lost 'em?

DWIGHT: Yeah.

HUMP: Well, hell. That beats all.

DWIGHT: Yeah.

HUMP: That's some tough luck.

DWIGHT: Yeah.

HUMP: How'd you come to lose all of 'em?

DWIGHT: They got killed.

HUMP: . . . Well. Shame about that.

DWIGHT: Yeah.

HUMP: Huh. Now, I have to ask you, Dwight. Has CD been drinking?

DWIGHT: Oh, now, the safe bet on a Saturday night is that CD has been drinking. You know that.

HUMP: Well, yep, I appreciate that about him, I tell you. But the fact is, if I see him, I'm going to have to run him in.

DWIGHT: Run him in?

HUMP: Yep.

DWIGHT: I been drinking. You going to run me in?

HUMP: No, no. I know you, and I think the best of you.

DWIGHT: Uh huh. Well, good luck finding him.

HUMP: Dwight, are you holding something against me here? Did I handle this wrong in your eyes?

CLARENCE: Daddy? Daddy?

DWIGHT: Yeah.

CLARENCE: Who's that talking?

DWIGHT: Go back to sleep.

CLARENCE: You're out there talking to someone, I heard you.

DWIGHT: Come on and see who it is, or go back to sleep.

(CLARENCE raises his head up and squints at his father blearily. Rubs his eyes. He lies back down.)

CLARENCE: I'm going back to sleep.

DWIGHT: All right then.

HUMP: Now, I want you to know that I appreciate your attitude about this. What happened to your girl was a tragedy. Nothing less than a tragedy.

DWIGHT: You didn't bring your gun out here with you, Hump?

HUMP: No.

DWIGHT: You didn't think you'd need it?

HUMP: No. And I didn't want it.

DWIGHT: You didn't want it? In case you had to use it? Like you was going to put down a gamecock.

HUMP: Dwight.

DWIGHT: You thought you was going to have to shoot you a bird.
Shoot you a mad old gamecock.

HUMP: No. No, I didn't. I just wanted to talk with you.

DWIGHT: You want to talk about what exactly?

HUMP: Ending it.

DWIGHT: . . . How we going to do that?

HUMP: Well. I need your help and your boys' help to do it.

DWIGHT: You remember being CD's age?

HUMP: Surely.

DWIGHT: You remember being Rye's age?

HUMP: I do.

DWIGHT: Point is, they ain't going to let us end this for 'em.

HUMP: I appreciate that, but cooler heads must prevail here, or we
are going to have hell on earth. Do you want that?

CLARENCE: (*Rising up out of the truck suddenly.*) Daddy. What are
you doing?

DWIGHT: Talking.

CLARENCE: To him? To him, Daddy?

DWIGHT: Yes, Clarence.

CLARENCE: I thought he was a liar and a bastard. You said so.

DWIGHT: Yeah, I did.

HUMP: Well, now, Dwight. We both said some things we regret—

CLARENCE: Hey, Daddy, where are the boys at?

DWIGHT: They're dead.

CLARENCE: What?

DWIGHT: We lost 'em.

CLARENCE: All of 'em? What about those three big Arkansas
Travelers?

DWIGHT: They went down.

CLARENCE: The gray clarets? Even that mean old Roundhead?

DWIGHT: Yeah.

CLARENCE: And old Spotty?

DWIGHT: Had his neck bit open.

CLARENCE: We lost every one of the boys?

DWIGHT: Every one of 'em.

CLARENCE: Not Duke. I raised Duke from a hatchling. I fed him dog's blood and vinegar. Duke's on his way to being a real killer. Didn't no other bird whup my Duke, Daddy. Right?

DWIGHT: Duke tried to run, boy. He wouldn't toe the line. He was a coward. I wrung his neck.

CLARENCE: No!

DWIGHT: Clarence, that's how it happened.

CLARENCE: No! You wouldn't of wrung Duke's neck, Daddy.

DWIGHT: You think I'm lying to you?

CLARENCE: No, but--

DWIGHT: Look in that pit.

CLARENCE: So?

DWIGHT: Whose feathers are down there?

CLARENCE: Arkansas traveler feathers. That feather there came off old Spotty's right wing tip. I seen it before. That same feather. Those are Duke's. Aw, Duke. Duke, awww no. Why'd you go and fight Duke, Daddy? Shirl gave me Duke. He weren't no coward. It ain't fair! Why'd you go and fight him? He's too little. Why did I sleep so long?

DWIGHT: You took a pill at the house. To make you sleep.

CLARENCE: Why did I do that?

DWIGHT: Cause your mama gave it to you.

CLARENCE: Why?

DWIGHT: Cause you was getting worked up. And you was seeing . . . her.

HUMP: Well, don't get worked up now, Clarence. We're all friends here.

CLARENCE: Where are the bodies at?

DWIGHT: I'm giving 'em to Ed McClaine for his cats.

CLARENCE: You givin' him Duke and Spotty?

DWIGHT: Yeah.

CLARENCE: Like they was trash?

DWIGHT: Yes, son.

CLARENCE: Do you think that they's cat food or something?

DWIGHT: I don't like your tone of voice.

CLARENCE: I hope every one of Ed McClaine's smelly old cats dies with a chicken bone in its throat. And if they don't, I'm going to go over to his house and kick the snot out of those cats anyway. Stomp on their ugly heads. Stomp them!

DWIGHT: No, you won't either.

HUMP: What I came out here to tell you, and I think I better just get to the point, is that I have put a warrant out for CD's arrest.

DWIGHT: A warrant?

CLARENCE: What's that?

HUMP: Clarence, it means I want to arrest your brother the next time I see him. For his own good. And I mean that.

CLARENCE: Daddy, what did CD do?

DWIGHT: Nothing I know of, son.

HUMP: It's what you call a precautionary arrest.

DWIGHT: Is it legal?

HUMP: It's in everybody's best interest.

DWIGHT: Is it legal?

HUMP: Well, you know CD has some outstanding traffic violations.

CLARENCE: Is that bad?

HUMP: I'm going to take him out to the jailhouse.

CLARENCE: It is bad.

HUMP: Just until he sobers up some. Come on now. You don't want him out there running around in his state of mind and drunk on top it all.

CLARENCE: Mama says CD'll never sober up.

HUMP: Clarence, I need to have this conversation with your Daddy, not you. Okay, sport?

CLARENCE: Daddy said you was a liar and a bastard and he'd like to take you off into the desert and shoot you like a dog. Is he lying about CD, Daddy?

DWIGHT: No, he ain't lying. Get in the truck and go back to sleep.

CLARENCE: What for?

DWIGHT: Just do it. I'm talking to Hump about grown-up things.

CLARENCE: Well, all right then. But I want to know what's going on around here!

DWIGHT: You going to settle down?

CLARENCE: I don't know. Maybe. Are you going to shoot him like a dog like you said? I'll feed his blood to the boys with vinegar.

DWIGHT: The boys are dead, Clarence.

(CLARENCE climbs in the back of the truck.)

HUMP: It is things like that, Dwight—telling your boys you'd like to take me out and shoot me—

CLARENCE: In the desert. Like a dog.

HUMP: Things like that are going to lead us to misunderstandings. What exactly is it you think I did to you, Dwight?

DWIGHT: I don't believe you'll give me and mine any justice, Hump.

HUMP: That ain't true. I can't let you take justice into your own hands, if that's what you mean. You're violent people. Now it ain't your fault. It's your nature. But, you can't give justice to violent people. Because what they consider just ain't what normal folks consider just.

DWIGHT: So you are going to arrest CD for unpaid parking tickets and that's going to solve everything?

HUMP: Dwight. Damnit, Dwight. You're going to make me change my mind about you.

DWIGHT: How do you mean?

HUMP: I've been real admiring of your attitude. You have been a real man about this. You buried your dead and put your head down and walked through the cannon fire. Just like you had to. Without flying half cocked at anything that moved. That's to your credit.

DWIGHT: What's CD done different?

HUMP: Well, you know he's going to try and Well, you know he's going to do something.

DWIGHT: What?

HUMP: Something violent to someone who doesn't deserve it.

CLARENCE: *(Looking around the back of the truck.)* Daddy. Hey, Daddy, where are the boys at?

DWIGHT: They're dead, Clarence. I told you that.

CLARENCE: I mean did Ed take 'em yet? What's this sack back here leaking blood? Daddy, there's a feed sack back here leaking blood! Is it Shirl?! It can't be Shirl! Shirl is that you? Shirl!

(CLARENCE squeezes the bloody feed sack and licks the blood from his fingers.)

A light shift. SHIRL, 17, enters. She crosses past the truck and CLARENCE stares at her wide-eyed. HUMP and DWIGHT don't see her. She is applying lipstick and then fixing her hair. She puts the lipstick and comb in a small purse.)

DWIGHT: No! Shirl's buried! Damnit, Clarence. Shirl's buried in the ground! Stop that! Remember? Don't you remember? We had her funeral and she's buried.

CLARENCE: No! Not Shirl.

SHIRL: Will you be quiet? Are you trying to wake Daddy up and get me in trouble? I don't know why I put up with you.

CLARENCE: I have to tell Daddy you're here.

SHIRL: Don't you tell Daddy nothing, Clary. Come on, now, I'll do something nice for you sometime.

CLARENCE: Daddy said stay home with me. Why don't you, Shirl?

SHIRL: I can't tonight, Clary. Rye's taking me out.

CLARENCE: Daddy said don't go out with Rye.

SHIRL: I like him.

CLARENCE: Why? You like him better than you like me?

SHIRL: Look, I'll help you with the boys tomorrow. You'll like that right? We'll start training Duke.

CLARENCE: Duke's going to be a killer.

SHIRL: He's going to live.

CLARENCE: He's gotta' be a killer to live.

SHIRL: Then he'll be one. We'll bleed one of the dogs tomorrow.

CLARENCE: Okay.

SHIRL: We'll make him mean. And then set him on a leghorn. See if we can rile him into killing it. That's for his confidence.

CLARENCE: His confidence.

SHIRL: To build it up. Once he gets used to killing, he'll be real good. I know he will.

CLARENCE: He'll be the best killer ever was. You'd like that.

SHIRL: I sure would.

CLARENCE: Yeah.

(RYE removes the rope from his wrists and runs into SHIRL and CLARENCE's scene. He grabs SHIRL up and whirls her around in a circle. She squeals.)

RYE: What are you doing?

SHIRL: What am I doing? What do you think? I'm waiting for you, cowboy.

CLARENCE: No, you weren't. We was talkin'.

RYE: Girl, you are in trouble. Didn't your daddy tell you to go to your room? And don't you go lying. I heard him.

CLARENCE: Shirl don't lie. We don't lie.

SHIRL: I didn't want to go to my room.

RYE: Well, sugar, where do you want to go?

SHIRL: Out with you.

RYE: All right then.

CLARENCE: Can I go?

RYE: No, you can't, Clarence. Get out of here, you little—

SHIRL: Rye, don't.

RYE: How do you stand to live in this house, Shirl? With your daddy and CD acting like such bastards all the time? And with this moron here following you around everywhere?

CLARENCE: I do not.

SHIRL: Rye, I said don't.

RYE: How do you like that daddy of yours? Tells me I'm a drunk to my face. If that ain't the pot calling the kettle black. And if CD gets on me again, so help me God, Shirl—

CLARENCE: You shut up about CD. He's my brother. I'm going to tell him what you just said.

SHIRL: Clarence, don't go get CD.

CLARENCE: He's talking bad about CD and Daddy.

SHIRL: And if you love me, you won't go telling on him.

CLARENCE: Shirl, why do you like him? Why don't you stay home and raise good little killers with me?

SHIRL: Don't you say that, Clary. Do you hear me? Don't say we're teaching them to be killers. Say we are teaching them how to live. Say it.

CLARENCE: No! But, stay with me and I will.

RYE: She ain't staying with you. She's my girl, Clarence. You ain't got a girl. Just a barnyard full of good friends.

SHIRL: Don't you make fun of him.

CLARENCE: Was he? CD'll beat the tar out of you for making fun of me.

SHIRL: Go inside.

CLARENCE: I hate you sometimes.

SHIRL: Don't say that.

RYE: Don't tell your sister that, retard.

CLARENCE: You shut up!

SHIRL: Rye. Don't pay him any mind.

CLARENCE: He better pay me mind. He better.

SHIRL: Clarence, go inside.

CLARENCE: No, I won't. I'm going to get Duke, and I'm going to sick him on this mean bastard.

SHIRL: Honey, Duke's still half a chick, remember? Daddy said don't fight him until—

CLARENCE: February.

SHIRL: Right. See? He's too little to fight. And it's nighttime. Go on in the house.

CLARENCE: When are you coming in?

SHIRL: When I get home.

CLARENCE: I want to go.

RYE: Why don't you get in the house like your sister told you?

CLARENCE: Why don't you get lost like my Daddy told you?

RYE: Shut your mouth.

SHIRL: Rye.

RYE: Why are you always defending him? If he goes around mouthing off like that to the wrong person—

SHIRL: He's my little brother.

CLARENCE: Twin brother, Shirl. Closer than little.

RYE: Do I have to take this from your Daddy, CD, and him?

SHIRL: Go on in, Clary. We won't be out long.

RYE: Hell, if we won't.

CLARENCE: I'll beat you up myself!

RYE: Get the hell out of here!

(RYE lunges at CLARENCE. CLARENCE cowers.)

SHIRL: No!

RYE: Oh, hell. Come on. Let's go.

SHIRL: Where we going?

RYE: I don't care.

SHIRL: You want to stop at TJs?

RYE: I don't care. Yeah.

SHIRL: Rye, don't be mad. He don't know how to act right.

CLARENCE: I do too. I act right all the time. Shirl, you tell him I act right. Tell him!

(RYE kisses her.)

CLARENCE: I hate you!

RYE: Well, I don't. You're beautiful. You're so soft. And your eyes are shining like rain. You look like—you just look so damned—

CLARENCE: No, she doesn't. She just looks like Shirl. Stay with me and we'll teach Duke. I'll strap some gaffs on his heels, like it was a real fight. And I'll get some scissors and we'll cut off his wattle. You have to do that so that the other birds don't get 'ahold of it with their beak and bring your boy down. And we'll carry him over to that old ping pong table in the garage. And we'll put him on it and make him practice his legwork. He'll be real spry when February comes. Quick on his feet. Come on, Shirl.

(SHIRL is lost staring up at RYE. She kisses him. He whirls her around again. They exit. Light shift.)

CLARENCE: Shirl?

DWIGHT: Clarence, don't tell me she isn't dead. You seen her buried.

CLARENCE: Yeah. Yeah, Daddy.

DWIGHT: That's just the birds.

CLARENCE: That's just the birds.

DWIGHT: We'll drop them off at Ed's house after a while. All right?

CLARENCE: All right.

DWIGHT: Don't go seeing Shirl and talking about her body. It's hard on a grown up person's nerves.

CLARENCE: Okay. I won't then.

HUMP: That's right, sport. Don't go upsetting your daddy. He's got enough on his plate.

DWIGHT: Oh, say, Hump. There was something I was going to tell you when I saw you.

HUMP: What's that?

DWIGHT: I saw Rye tonight. Earlier. Didn't talk much with him. He went off too fast.

HUMP: You say you seen Rye? Well. Where's he at?

DWIGHT: He's with CD.

(Light shift.)

CD: Get back in the truck.

TAMMY: No, I will not. Not until you tell me what you are up to out here.

CD: Tammy, go on now.

TAMMY: You have got yourself drunk as a skunk. Now you yourself get back in that truck and let me drive you over to your Mama's house. There is a thermos full of coffee in the front seat.

CD: Goddamnit.

TAMMY: Don't you curse at me. I don't care what you been through this week, I won't stand it.

CD: Honey, Rye and I are talking. And I don't want you to see this.

TAMMY: You said we'd leave him out here. All right then, let's leave him. Rye, I'll call your mama and tell her where to look for you when we get back to town.

CD: Don't you talk to him. Don't you do it. This here ain't no human being. This is just a piece of dirt.

TAMMY: Let's just leave then. You got your revenge, honey. Shirl is resting easy now.

CD: Nobody is resting easy yet.

TAMMY: Okay, now, honey. Now look at him. He is broken. You won. And you better get home now because your Mama is going to be worried. She already buried one child this week. CD? Just walk away with me right now. Here take my hand.

CD: I told Shirl she could do better than this here animal. And she could have. He never loved her.

(RYE screams in protest and shakes his head frantically. He tries to head butt CD.)

TAMMY: Boys! Now, boys! CD, all right now. Stop it now.

(She tries to step between the men and CD pushes her away.)

CD: Don't you defend him.

TAMMY: You get your hand off me, CD.

CD: I didn't hurt you.

TAMMY: You shoved me and you grabbed my arm.

CD: I didn't mean nothing.

TAMMY: You probably bruised my arm.

CD: Well, I am sorry if I did. But this is something I just got to do. I need you not to watch.

TAMMY: What are you going to do?

CD: Ain't you cold? Honey, you're trembling. Go get your jacket and sit in the truck with the heater on.

TAMMY: What are you aiming to do? You wanted to beat him up and leave him out here. Well, go on. You beat him up. Now, CD, let's go. CD? I ain't going back to that truck. So whatever you are fixing to do, you are going to have to do it right in front of me.

(Pause.)

CD: Well, I'm sorry for that. All right then. You stay here and watch.

(Kicks RYE in the side as he passes him. CD exits. Light shift. CLARENCE opens the bloody sack.)

DWIGHT: Don't go rooting around in there. Clarence, leave those birds be.

HUMP: Help me find him. You have to have some idea where CD took him.

DWIGHT: You been lying to me.

HUMP: I never did. About what?

DWIGHT: About how it happened.

HUMP: I wouldn't do that. I would never do that.

CLARENCE: *(Jumps up suddenly. He holds the body of a small rooster.)* Daddy, what did you do to Duke?

DWIGHT: I wrung his neck. He was a coward, I told you.

CLARENCE: Daddy. How could you?

DWIGHT: Those were my birds, Clarence.

CLARENCE: No! They were mine as much as they were yours. Duke was mine. Just after he was hatched Shirl put him in my hand and said "this one's yours, Clarence. Take good care of him, he's a baby." And I was taking care of him for Shirl. He weren't even old enough to fight yet. You said so. You said don't fight him until February. We didn't trim his wattle or shave his comb, neither. And you did what you said never to do! Did you forget?

DWIGHT: No.

CLARENCE: Were you just being mean? Daddy, this was my Duke.

DWIGHT: Hush, Clarence. Just a bird.

HUMP: Where is my nephew? I ain't leaving him out there, god knows where, with that son of yours. He don't deserve that. Not just for having the bad taste to love your daughter.

DWIGHT: He's getting what he deserves.

HUMP: Dwight, you don't think . . . Now, you couldn't possibly be thinking . . .

DWIGHT: That Rye killed my girl and you covered it up?

HUMP: Is that your opinion? I have always been good to you and yours. If I had to pull CD drunk off the highway, I never made a big deal about it, but I bet I saved his life a number of times. Not to mention his bar fights and the times Tammy called me out to her place. I been better to CD than he deserves. And I been on your side the whole time here.

DWIGHT: I know you done us some good in the past.

HUMP: And you think I'd lie about Shirl's murder?

DWIGHT: You ain't been exactly forthcoming about your investigation, have you?

HUMP: There are some things you don't want to know about my investigation. It wasn't Rye. I can tell you that for a fact. Tell me where you picked him up. Maybe I can figure out where CD went.

DWIGHT: Rye was walking into TJ's and me and CD drove up and caught him in the parking lot.

CLARENCE: (*Pulling a small sack of gaffs from the back of the truck.*) Daddy. The gaff bag's back here. And you never even opened it. Didn't you give the boys their gaffs?

DWIGHT: I couldn't give 'em the gaffs.

CLARENCE: Oh, no, Daddy. Were you hurting so bad you couldn't tie 'em on? Oh, you should have woke me! Why didn't you?

HUMP: When was this?

DWIGHT: Oh, long about the time you stopped trailing me to go get supper. Don't blame yourself, though, Hump. You had to eat.

HUMP: Do you have any idea what CD means to do? There's miles of farmland out there. Where would you start looking?

CLARENCE: Oh, Daddy. They wasn't even armed. They went into that pit all alone.

DWIGHT: CD's going to kill him, I imagine. Don't you?

HUMP: Oh, Christ.

CLARENCE: Those other cocks had razors strapped to their legs. They didn't even stand a chance. And Duke was my bird. He didn't have him a single gaff. That other bird must of tore him plumb apart! No wonder he ran! He weren't no coward, Daddy. Its just that other bird had those big old gaffs and Duke just had his feet and his beak.

HUMP: Now, it's no kind of fair match, CD and Rye. You know that. What if you're wrong?

DWIGHT: You ain't told a single lie to me? You swear it?

HUMP: Dwight, as God is my witness, I swear it. I have been one hundred percent honest. Rye is innocent—

DWIGHT: You found her just like you said?

HUMP: In a ditch out by the cemetery. She died there. I know that from the way the blood fell. Her purse and her watch were missing. Probably a robbery. Maybe somebody just took those things to make it look like a robbery. I am investigating it, Dwight. I can't tell you everything.

DWIGHT: Why couldn't Rye have done it? She was out with Rye. Clarence saw them leave.

CLARENCE: Yeah. Shirl left with that boy. She snuck out.

HUMP: They went out. But they got in a fight, and Rye came home. I know in my heart he didn't do it because I know that boy. And I know in my head that he didn't do it because he was at home by ten that night. His mama swore that to me, and the neighbors saw him drive up. All right? And when I found Shirl at around two that morning, she was still warm, Dwight.

DWIGHT: So I got your word, your sister's word, and the neighbor's word. All I got is words. Did you fingerprint the bottle?

HUMP: I got some partial prints off pieces. Not enough to match from.

DWIGHT: So you don't really have a whole lot.

CLARENCE: I bet that's just feathers from our boys down there. And their blood. They probably didn't even draw blood on the other birds.

DWIGHT: What are you getting worked up for, Clarence? Chickens get butchered every day. No one makes a fuss. Hell, little girls get torn to pieces in the street and no one makes much of a fuss in this town.

HUMP: Dwight, I'll find out who did this. I have leads.

DWIGHT: What leads?

HUMP: I can't tell you.

DWIGHT: Cause they don't exist.

HUMP: No. Cause you won't want to hear it.

(Light shift. TAMMY rips the duct tape off RYE's mouth and removes the belt.)

TAMMY: Get up and run off into that cornfield. I call your mama and tell her to pick you up along the highway. Go on now.

RYE: He busted my knee.

TAMMY: Well can you walk?

RYE: No.

TAMMY: Well, can you crawl away and hide?

(RYE tries to climb to one knee and falls to his back retching and groaning.)

TAMMY: Rye, you have to get up.

RYE: I can't.

TAMMY: If you don't want to be joining Shirl you better try.

(RYE slowly tries to find a way to rise, carefully placing his weight on his good leg.)

RYE: I didn't kill her, Tammy

TAMMY: Just hush. Rye. I don't want to hear you. Just get up and get out of here before he catches you again.

RYE: You think I killed her?

TAMMY: I don't have any opinions. Get the hell up.

RYE: I wouldn't. I couldn't have.

TAMMY: You damned well could've.

RYE: No! No. Help me, please, Tammy.

(TAMMY looks off toward the truck, then helps RYE rise and starts leading him to the edge of the cornfield.)

TAMMY: Just get out into that field. Get as far away as possible. I'll distract him.

RYE: I couldn't have hit her. Hit her soft little body. Her little baby face. Her little hands. She was-- . . . I treasured her. I just treasured her and CD is telling lies about me.

TAMMY: No he's not.

RYE: Why wasn't I arrested if I killed her? Why aren't I in jail?

TAMMY: Your uncle is the sheriff.

RYE: He knows I didn't do it.

TAMMY: Hush up and concentrate on walking.

RYE: I loved her. It was CD probably killed her. He's an animal.

(TAMMY drops him suddenly, a few feet from the corn. RYE cries out. Light shift.)

HUMP: All right, then, Dwight. I understand how you feel. I'll tell you something you don't want to know, then. About Shirl.

DWIGHT: One those leads of yours?

HUMP: Something about your girl you ain't going to want to hear.

(SHIRL comes bouncing in excitedly, with a paper bag. She sits down next to RYE.)

SHIRL: He sold it to me! Like he doesn't see me in church every Sunday and know how old I am.

RYE: Of course he did. Cain't nobody resist you, girl.

SHIRL: I thought he'd say something at least.

RYE: What did you get?

SHIRL: Your beer.

RYE: Good girl.

SHIRL: And some tequila.

RYE: Tequila? What for?

SHIRL: I never had it.

RYE: You ain't?

SHIRL: No, I want to.

RYE: Well, you ain't starting tonight. What are you, some sort of lush?

(Takes the bag from her.)

SHIRL: Give that here.

RYE: I sure won't. What would your daddy say, girl? And CD? They would think I was some sort of bad influence.

SHIRL: They already do.

RYE: No, sir. Drinking and having sex at your age. You sure you go to church every Sunday?

SHIRL: Yes, I do.

RYE: I don't believe it.

SHIRL: Clarence likes the singing.

RYE: And you like the tequila. Guess we know who the bad twin is.

SHIRL: I said I never tried it.

RYE: What were you waiting for?

SHIRL: Something special. I just want a little.

RYE: *(Pulls a tiny bottle of tequila out of the bag.)* Well, a little is all you're getting.

SHIRL: Just a taste. Not much.

RYE: *(Pulls a bottle of beer out of the bag. A Miller Lite.)* Shit. Last time you buy the liquor, honey. Miller Lite?

SHIRL: It was the first thing I saw, I was nervous. I like those if you don't. I got your Jack.

(RYE finds a bigger bottle of Jack Daniels and opens it.)

SHIRL: Don't go getting drunk, Rye.

RYE: Come on now, sugar. I had to talk to your daddy and CD both tonight before I could sneak you out of the house. I earned it. Where's the rest of my beer?

SHIRL: Back in the store. You don't need it.

RYE: All right.

(He gathers her up in his arms and begins necking and nuzzling.)

SHIRL: That's nice.

RYE: Umm hmmm.

SHIRL: I want to enjoy this night, Rye. God, ain't it nice out? I like this so well. Being alone with you. You know that, right? You believe me?

RYE: Ummmm.

SHIRL: Rye, talk to me.

RYE: We didn't come out here to talk.

SHIRL: Rye.

RYE: Well, I didn't.

SHIRL: I wanted to say some things to you tonight.

RYE: What did I do?

SHIRL: Can't we just talk?

RYE: At least start drinking. The drunker I get you, the less talking we have to do.

(RYE opens the tequila for her and holds it to her lips.)

SHIRL: Just a little. Not much. Just a taste.

RYE: Oh, go on now and have a drink. Drink it right, Shirl. Don't make me drink alone.

(She drinks.)

SHIRL: I just wanted to know what it tasted like.

RYE: What's it taste like?

SHIRL: Medicine.

RYE: Get us some limes next time.

SHIRL: Is that why people do that? Eat limes with it?

RYE: Yeah.

SHIRL: It's awful.

RYE: You wanted to taste it.

SHIRL: I may not get another chance. Not for a while.

RYE: Why?

SHIRL: I ain't going to drink no more.

RYE: Why not?

SHIRL: Not for a while.

RYE: You get religion? Jesus, I hope not.

SHIRL: No.

RYE: Why then? Don't be like this, Shirl. I already got my mother preaching at me and glaring at me if I so much as bring a beer in the house. Why don't you drink with me and have a good time?

SHIRL: Because of the baby.

RYE: What?

SHIRL: The baby.

RYE: You're--?

(She smiles and nods. He whoops with surprise and delight. He hugs her fiercely, kisses her ecstatically. Light shift.)

HUMP: One of the reasons Rye's been grieving so hard, is that he's grieving for two. Shirl was pregnant.

CLARENCE: How'd she go and do that?

DWIGHT: You know where babies come from.

CLARENCE: Yeah. CD told me. Boy, Shirl does some funny things.

(CLARENCE laughs.)

DWIGHT: You have some evidence of that?

HUMP: It's in the coroner's report. Now, I know that Rye has never been your favorite person, Dwight. And he's been through some wild phases. But you can't think he'd kill her knowing she was carrying his child.

(Light shift. Rye snatches the tequila out of SHIRL's hand.)

RYE: Put that down. What were you thinking drinking that?

SHIRL: I just had enough to wet my mouth. So I didn't spend nine months thinking about it.

RYE: Don't you dare drink. You're going to have a baby?

SHIRL: Yeah.

RYE: Oh, Jesus, Shirl, I love you. You know that, right?

SHIRL: I hope so.

RYE: I do, I love you. Your soft sweet little hands, your little feet. Your little pink ears. I love you. I am going to make you the best husband. I'm a new man right now.

SHIRL: You don't have to be a new man. I love the old man.

RYE: And we'll have a house to raise our baby in. And we're going to get married! Jesus, our baby. A baby! Aw, Shirl. Why didn't you tell me?

SHIRL: I just did.

RYE: I never even suspected. When did it happen?

SHIRL: A while back.

RYE: When though? What, was I too drunk to get a rubber on? . . . Oh, I'm sorry. No, that don't matter. It don't even matter, honey. I am so happy.

SHIRL: You think my Daddy and CD will hold a grudge? Or will they get drunk at the wedding?

RYE: I think they'll show up drunk at the wedding.

SHIRL: No. Mama won't let 'em. Are we really going to have a house?

RYE: You bet. As soon as we can.

SHIRL: Near my folks' place?

RYE: I hope not.

SHIRL: Rye. They're my folks. And I want to be near my mama and Clarence.

RYE: I don't want to be near your daddy and CD. Your mama is welcome to live near us. By herself.

SHIRL: She needs my help with all those men in the house.

RYE: Only one man in your house from now on. Unless this little fellow is a boy.

SHIRL: Clarence only minds me. He's going to take this hard.

RYE: He'll take it harder when we go to Austin.

SHIRL: Austin? What for?

RYE: College. That's where my scholarship is. That's where we'll buy our house.

SHIRL: I can't go to Austin.

RYE: Why not?

SHIRL: I can't leave my family like that. .

RYE: I'm your family now. Me and my baby. And you're mine. I'll take care of you.

SHIRL: Then don't go off to Austin and leave me.

RYE: Shirl. What's here for us?

SHIRL: My family is here.

RYE: Well. We don't have to decide right now. And don't you even think about drinking none of this, Mama.

SHIRL: I could take it home for CD or Daddy.

RYE: No, I don't want them drinking it. Not right before I tell 'em we're pregnant. Put it in the truck.

SHIRL: All right. I got to go buy some gum to get this taste out of my mouth.